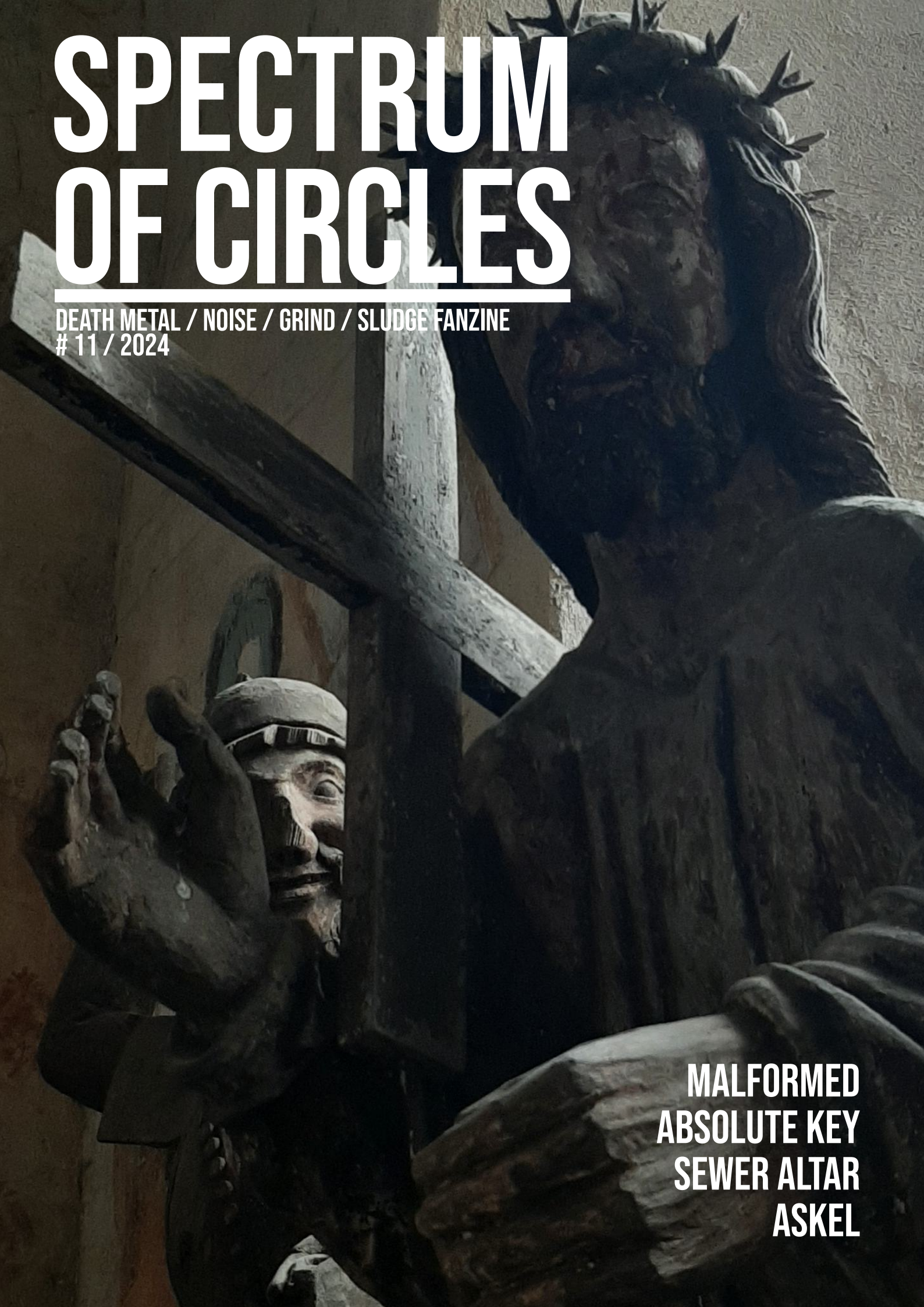


SPECTRUM OF CIRCLES



DEATH METAL / NOISE / GRIND / SLUDGE FANZINE
11 / 2024

MALFORMED
ABSOLUTE KEY
SEWER ALTAR
ASKEL

I won't bleed from my palms or see the statues bleed

Spectrum of Circles # 1, December 2023: Aedes, Itsesaastutus, Kova Totuus, Morbific.

Spectrum of Circles # 2, December 2023: Gorekaust, Lähdön Aika, Hekatoxen, Sonic Poison

Spectrum of Circles # 3, February 2024: Soul Incursion, True Grit, Disguised Malignance, Castrated Youth

Spectrum of Circles # 4, March 2024: Hoc est Bellum, Below the Graves, Grave with a View, Skepticism

Spectrum of Circles # 5, March 2024: Azatoth, Sulfuric Cautery, Thin Line, Sacred Crucifix

Spectrum of Circles # 6, April 2024: Health Issues, Sequestrum, Cerebrum, Baron + Bloodlands, Fury of Livez

Spectrum of Circles # 7, April 2024: Taser, Gutrefaxion, Kuvotus, Ilon Lapset

Spectrum of Circles # 8, May 2024: Whisper, Haudat, Cryptic Hatred, Gray State

Spectrum of Circles # 9, July 2024: Praise, Guts, Kaivs, Sentenced

Spectrum of Circles # 10, August 2024: Necrotic Ooze, Omnivortex, No Exceptions, Savage Gospel

Ajatuksen Valo # 19, December 2023: Sonic Poison, Exit Condition, Loppusijoitus. In Finnish only!

Ajatuksen Valo # 20, April 2024: Juska Kuhanen, Antti Kivimäki, Antti Klemi

(Ajatuksen Valo # 19 and # 20 the only Ajatuksen Valo that's been issued as a PDF, all the previous issues were printed. I do have some older issues, but I need to check availability. Costs might be high, but the zine prices are low. Use Tawastian Tower Productions email for inquiries.

Contact

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Ads: We are not looking for any ads, but stuff that aligns with the contents of Spectrum of Circles can be considered. Please contact us for further information.

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Malformed: Eero Palmu (photo), GodVomit (logo)
Absolute Key: Antti Klemi, apart from "Man, mixer and the microphone stand" (Lauri Koppel) and live photo (credit unknown)
Sewer Altar: Jouni Parkku
Askel: Jouni Parkku

Thanks to everyone involved.

Playlist

Absu – Barathrum: V.I.T.R.I.O.L.,
The Sun of Tiphareth & The Third
Storm of Cythraul
Agathocles – Death To Capitalist
Noise Core
Black Funeral – Vampyr - Throne
of the Beast & Moon of Characith
& Flames of Samūm
Chaotian – Effigies of
Obsolescence
Eagles – Hotel California
Enslaved – Vikingligr Veldi
Fifth Angel – S/t
Hollow Woods – Like Twisted
Bones of Fallen Giants
Judas Iscariot – Thy Dying Light &
Heaven in Flames
Lucubration – Blood Massacre of
the Anodyne
Necrolepsy – Necrology
Profanatica – The Enemy of Virtue
Rot – Cruel Face of Life
Spectral Voice – Sparagmos
Tangorodrim – Unholy and
Unlimited

Editorial

A^{ve},

After eleven editorials it's becoming fairly obvious that the editorials are the last to be finished when a new issue of Spectrum of Circles is about to manifest itself. It's like a night before sending the finished PDF into the printing press – yes, I pay such attention to details as if it was actually going to print. That, of course, includes at least two "Export as PDF" procedures after I carefully examine every version of the issue only to find about some minor details that need to be fixed – yet you still find them after the issue has been published. That's one hell of a loop, I tell you... and then you notice that you have 26 pages, but eventually don't give a damn, since it's a PDF ending up on people's screens and home (or office) printers, which don't really care whether you can divide the page count by four or not.

After eleven – or actually twelve, since the first issue had two – editorials it is still quite peculiar to observe the amount of published Spectrum of Circles's placed into proportion with the passage of time. Somehow that reminds me of one late Swedish zine called Distortion Faith, that was published a decade ago (and distributed thru my distro as well). That zine specialized in raw punk/d-beat/mångel, and it really stood out thanks to the content, publishing pace and it's personal appearance. They had three editors with each one of them having a style of their own, bound together by their love towards raw hardcore punk. They managed to churn out six issues between summer 2012 and spring 2014, and then they were gone.

What does that have to do with Spectrum of Circles? Of course, projects such as Spectrum of Circles and Distortion Faith share the similar flame that puts things in motion, once the editor(s) really hit pedal to the metal. Yeah, you could also say that my pace with Ajatuksen Valo was something insane, as well. And it really was. Of course those zines can be seen as cautionary examples, and naturally I've been thinking a few times if I'm too excited in doing Spectrum of Circles. Should I slow down? Don't I have anything better to do?

This was also the first time I had to consider my policy for the ads. That was something I just hadn't need to think about before I was approached about the matter... and I still don't have a strict policy about them. You can see what kind of shit is included in these pages, so make your conclusions out of that. You can also notice that there are no ads in this particular issue due to initial proposal falling through (not related to Spectrum of Circles), but the can of worms has been opened.

Malformed interview is possibly the shortest one this zine has published, but I'm okay with that. Absolute Key, on the other hand, is among the longest. I can live with that, too. Sewer Altar and Askel were equally fun to make. I also noticed that every interview in this issue starts with "Hello! How are you doing?". Well, you got to start them with something, right? Again, apart from Absolute Key's interview, which was conducted almost real-time via feverish email exchange in August and September, I had no idea what acts would share the same issue... nothing new here!

We also present you the most lavish and detailed description of a BEHERIT ritual (which actually took place on August 30th, 2024 AD. The ritual I thought I'd never live to witness.) you'll probably read within the next five minutes. Finally a reason and even some context to putting the BEHERIT logo on these pages!



"Ow!"

Be... sure to follow the Spectrum of Circles on Instagram; I thought I would ever say this, but it seems it has become the most important channel to spread news about SoC, at least for the time being. There's a Facebook account too, but it doesn't seem to reach that many people for some reason. I'm generally not a fan of spreading information about new SoC stuff thru social media channels, but it seems I have to. Suggestions for the better channels are welcome! (But I'm not doing this for the likes or downloads; in fact, I have no idea how many times these issues are downloaded, since Dropbox lacks statistics for that. Yeah, I didn't know that before, either, but someone downloads these. See the paragraph dealing with ad policy.)

Front cover and the editorial pictures are taken at the Holy Cross Church, Hattula, Tavastia Proper (north from here). You can think what you want about christianity (me and my kids don't belong to national church, that's all I'm saying now), but the churches can be cool. As opposed to previous issue, all of the acts interviewed here somehow do connect with that crude represantions of Jesus F. Christ* livin' thru hard times.

September 2024

-J

*Ps. I believe the F stands for Fitzgerald. What else were you thinking?



Youthful vigor bred with embrace of old school practitios has always been proven a successful formula. Malformed's "The Gathering of Souls" is yet another fine example of Finnish death metal's vitality as of 2023. Given the fact that this crew hasn't existed longer than mere two years, they are certainly worth your attention.

Hello! How are you doing?

Eetu: Hi and thanks for reaching out! We finished our first full tour with Galvanizer two weeks ago, after which we've mostly rested and gotten back to our normal life, jobs, etc.

First of all, I'd like to ask you what makes death metal great?

Eetu: There's no way to bullshit your way around death metal. You have to have the energy, anger, and know-how to create this kind of noise...

How would you describe the noise you make?

Eetu: A melting pot of influences from Finland with both Demi's, -god and -lich combined with North American bands like old Cryptopsy, Gorguts and Suffocation. The cherry on top of this rotten cake is our own way to combine the aforementioned bands and add our own spice to the mix.

If we speak of musical influences, I think I'm hearing quite a lot of Convulse in there. It might be just me, but the post-reunion Convulse in particular that came up to my mind, for some reason. Perhaps the soundscape is similar, but perhaps it's something else, can't really tell.

Eetu: Interesting!"World Without God" absolutely rules and we have definitely listened to that album a lot, but the post-reunion Convulse hasn't really clicked for us, or we maybe haven't given the time needed for it to click...

There is one certain, distinctive feature in Malformed's sound that caught my attention; the bass sound. First of all, it's audible. Secondly, there's a certain tone in it, and it almost sounds like a fretless bass. Was it intentional to pay attention to bass and highlight it? What kind of equipment you use to achieve that... I mean, is it fretless or not? Also, bass seems like an percussion tool. I mean, there's these certain "TWANG" sounds in places where you usually hear cymbals crashing.

Eetu: Pauli has his own very technical and twisted way of playing, like Alex Webster on acid. He does these fucked up twangy slaps, with a relatively clean tone. He used a fretless bass on the demo, after which he has been using a Spector loaded with EMG's... and frets. One thing also worth mentioning about Pauli's bass playing is his ability to bring that own twisted touch to every riff. The songs have been and will be written mostly by me, with some riffs here and there by Pauli and Akseli, but Pauli's signature sound gives the basslines a whole another layer of... malformity!

You have released this live album, recorded at Tiivistämö in March 2023. What prompted you to record and release it? It's not an everyday occasion to publish something like that, especially when the band is still in it's early stages of existence. The cover art for "Live at Tiivistämö" is quite nice! Yeah, there's certainly something similar in pronunciation of Malformed and Marlboro, as both of them can be referred to as "Mallu". Have you gotten any feedback on that one?

Eetu: Tiivistämö records every show, I think? I can't recall why we released it, probably only because of the cover art! Since the demo had been called "Mallun punanen" (Marlboro Red) by our friends, I came up with the concept of doing a cigarette pack style cover, which was

finalized and improved by Jami of TÄH records! The live album was only released through a very limited tape

batch, which sold out immediately.

That tape was published thru Täh! Records. Who took the initial initiative to publish it? How you got in contact with those Riihimäki maniacs in the first place?

Eetu: We've known Jami Mehtonen for years through shows with our previous bands. I think the plan was just to do some release with the cigarette artwork, so the live recording was deemed good enough for the release.

You have had your recordings published by Rotted Life (US) and Extremely Rotten Productions (DK). How did you got in contact with them? I guess you could say you have gotten your spot in the international death metal spotlight!

Eetu: Jason from Rotted Life reached out to us after the demo's release and kindly wanted to release the demo via every physical format – eternal gratitude to Jason for that!

We played a show with Phrenelith back in March 2023, drank a few beers with David Mikkelsen there and have been working with him ever since that! David also organized our first ever shows outside of Finland in January 2024, so he has really helped push Malformed forward and we'll be eternally grateful for his contributions!

The band was formed merely two years ago, but you have certainly achieved something. Keeping it cool?

Eetu: Working hard while hardly working... We wouldn't be anywhere without the aforementioned record labels and our killer fans, and we have been so damn lucky so far!

This is the second time already I'm referencing to Michael Poulsen's video from December 2023. You know, the one which featured him presenting his favorite death metal records of 2023 and proclaiming Sonic Poison's "Eruption" as number one. He also introduced Malformed in there, and there's quite a few views on that video. Did this caught you be surprise?

Eetu: The biggest surprise is someone from Volbeat listening to anything decent...

Death metal seems to be a lively creature these days, especially around these parts. What do you think of the the scene today, both internationally and locally?

Eetu: The scene here in Finland has new bands popping up out of nowhere every week! Most of the old legends do legacy shows every now and then, too. The same can be said about the international scene also, as far as I know!

What happens next? Any news you care to share at this point?

Eetu: Debut album! Hopefully it will be out sooner rather than later, early 2025 being the goal right now. Everything has been recorded and mixed for a long time now, but artworks, layouts and vinyl pressings etc always take a while.

I have nothing else to ask. Thanks for the interview!

Thank you!

Behelit

I went to see Behelit.

It was great.

The lights were blue.

Abe Satan.

Abe Lucifer.

Time to die.



"One flame with two shadows, studying this universe through both black metal / noise / industrial chaos and ambient / electro / poetry wanderings."

That's how Absolute Key's Bandcamp profile summarizes the essence of Absolute Key. I can't say if that description raises even more questions than it succeeds in presenting answers, but this interview might yield some.

The first sightings of Absolute Key don't date further than the end of previous decade, but the sheer amount of the work of Absolute Key is something that forces you to kneel in silence to pay respect. Like Haudat (see Spectrum of Circles # 8), once the noise wave really washes over you, you just got to go with the flow and to completely surrender yourself under it's influence.



Hello! How are you?

Hello there! All is quite fine in my direction. A relaxing vacation is reaching its end, but I got a new four-tracker last week and it has inspired me to work with the new songs... Nothing beats a good tape hiss! Also this limitation to four tracks makes you to think things from different angles, and you have to ponder and work harder to find a good balance between the tracks. But this has been only a positive challenge, and I'm quite satisfied with this new material. Quite gloomy and haunting material, tripping somewhere between ambient, death industrial and noise. Field recordings from a construction work area nearby, contact mic rumble, bells and chains and of course some old Aleksis Kivi poem recitations from the 1963 vinyl!

Sounds like fun for the whole family! Apart from new equipment, is that process different than usual?

Well, mostly no. Usually I build structures and sounds in my mind - usually while jogging or laying in bed before falling asleep - and then I start to hunt those sounds with my gadgets. So I think my process differs from a typical style, where an artist starts to create sounds and see what is good and what is not. My visions can be quite strong beforehand, but the problem is how to execute that vision, heh. Sometimes it's easy - I achieve materializing my vision on the first try - but sometimes it's a hit-and-miss thing. I don't have a stable rack of equipment but I build and dismantle and build it again depending on what I try to achieve. I am more a visionary than an engineer so to speak so sometimes there could be an easier way to work with these things, but well, you live and you learn. Absolute Key has been active for five years now, and the path of learning is still very vast and long.

I think I know what you mean, and yeah, having your creative juices flowing just before bedtime can be hellish at times, hah. But I don't think that "driven by vision" approach is atypical; popular music has seen good examples since the days of Brian Wilson and

the co, but I guess that depends on where you look at it. But where do you actually stand? I have followed Absolute Key's path since the beginning and I still have hard time to figure out what it is about - both musically and mentally.

I am a man who likes to ponder things, find new pathways, and marvel at this universe and my role in all this. I have done this in my lyrics in my other band Circle Of Ouroboros, and now I have started to do it through sounds too. It may sound a bit too over-the-top and artsy, but I want to believe that the main goal of art (yeah, I consider my music and for example noise 'art') is to get a better understanding of life and this world and maybe share these views with the audience. I observe things around me, these observations start to live in me, sometimes they almost possess me, and I have to set them free by clothing them in sounds and notes.

So it's hard to put in words what Absolute Key is about strictly because my observations and thoughts vary a lot - sometimes I feel hate, sometimes I feel sorrow, sometimes I feel love - and all these emotions are feeding my working process. Of course the main element is quite dark - I'm a heavy-hearted metalhead after all, haha - and it's just natural and somehow more rewarding to inject those more pessimistic and negative thoughts into my music, but Absolute Key - as life itself - isn't just about that.

When it comes to music itself, I guess I am a "jack of all trades but master of none" type guy. My head is full of different visions, so it's hard to concentrate on one specific style. Sometimes I need heavier, simpler elements, and sometimes more experimental ways of approach. I would love to be a more concentrated or perfectionist person. Although I ponder a lot with the sounds sometimes, quite often I am happy with the result that can be achieved with the know-how and skills that I possess. I am very lousy and lazy when it comes to practicing, for example; although I have released some guitar-driven BM albums, I don't know how to play the guitar, notes, etc. I think I'm into this "can't play, don't care" attitude, and noise music is a perfect platform for that. Don't get me wrong, this doesn't mean that anybody could just start playing noise, and there are true artists that are as skilled with their instruments as some guitar heroes, but that is not a way for me. As I mentioned before, I am driven by visions.

But now we have derailed a bit... You asked something about... music? Actually, I just listened to some bits and pieces from my first demo, and I was a bit surprised at how coherent it was compared to the stuff I'm doing now, haha! So there is a red line going through my doings after all. It is a mixture of black metal, noise, industrial, ambient... Organic sounds and "real" instruments entwined with machines. And I like that there is always something happening in my songs, although the meditative side can be present too. I guess my way of making my songs is closer to actual songwriting than with many other noise artists.

I don't think that was off-topic at all, actually. Truth to be told, I haven't heard every single Absolute Key release - actually quite the opposite, but I think that one denominator in them is the scale of emotions,

and to be precise, the presence of them. Of course, one could argue that all music is about expressing emotions, with anger or hatred being a prominent theme in metal, for an example. This certain processing of emotions is something I feel that Circle of Ouroboros equally shared, even though Circle of Ouroboros is more closely connected to black metal context and Circle of Ouroboros is about the co-operation of you and Atvar... and I recall that the second issue of Arise! Zine you edited was all about emotions, so I guess emotions are the defining factor of the stuff you do?

Emotions are a crucial part of Absolute Key and my doings in general, no doubt. However, I wouldn't say that I'm an emotional person, but when I start working on these issues, I usually dive deeper and deeper into the topic. Think about when you were a child and you – consciously or subconsciously – made your fears bigger than they actually were. You pushed yourself to the edge of maniac joy or total sadness or anxiety. I try to do something similar with my music. I'm living a quite safe and steady mid-class life, but it's somehow purifying to draw yourself into the deepest pits of despair or into the darkest corners of anguish. And it gets just more interesting when you are operating on the fields of abstract soundscapes like noise; what is the sound that describes longing best? Or depression? It is easy to write happy rock songs or sad rock songs, but how do you make sad noise? Of course, noise isn't just pure sound detached from any emotions, and there is a vast variety of emotions going on in this genre, but I think this is an interesting and important point of view in my opinion, at least for me.

So, Absolute Key is a mean to "escape" the realities of life and throes of thinking of your shopping list for the next week? Yes, searching for that experience can be purifying experience, but can it get too strenuous? Do you need to "search" for the right mood or is drawing inspiration from the reality enough?

I wouldn't say that I am running away from reality with Absolute Key, I just observe this reality in a more aesthetic light. And these emotions don't come up from nowhere, they are the result of what I see and feel around me. For example, there will be one AK album out next year that draws inspiration from the desperate situations in Ukraine and Gaza, and that album is very tightly connected to the realities of life. Of course, I give my mind a chance to wander freely sometimes, and there are some philosophical, poetical and imaginative themes and aspects present. Also, when we are talking about noise, we are dealing with quite abstract elements. Sometimes sound is just sound, more or less. For example, I maybe have that certain vision in my mind, then I turn it into a song, but after that I have difficulties giving that song a proper name. So things can be very clear and very obscure at the same time on different levels.

What comes to the latter part of your question: the "Absolute Key mode" isn't on all the time. Usually I work in strong bursts, and when that kind of burst is going on, the process is very intense and sometimes exhausting. I just go through the songs in my mind, analyzing them, dismantling and rebuilding them, thinking about what kind of part is missing, what should be replaced etc. Now that I have been on vacation and I have had almost all the time in my hands, it has been just relaxing and satisfying to dive into that zone, but when you have other obligations to fulfill (for example, make that shopping list), then it gets a bit frustrating, heh. So, if there are longer quiet periods in my life without any musical activity, I don't get worried about it. The flame is always burning in me. Sometimes it can wither a bit, but it is always there.

Yeah, that's why I used quotation marks in "escape".

At least usually escapism is a deliberate break from reality, a way to think of something nice for a change, but each to their own. But I guess Absolute Key is more of a way to filter and process the emotions that evoke from life?

Well, as an art consumer/receiver, the escapism aspect is obviously playing a more prominent role. When I am listening to Iron Maiden or witnessing a good noise show, I don't want to think about the realities of life or my own problems; I just want to sink deep into that soundscape. And same thing with my own doings, that actual process when you are working with the sound: that can be a very meditative journey where you forget the real world and it's just you and the sound. But still, the first spark and idea aren't coming from somewhere else; they are coming from me, and I can't detach them from my own thoughts and emotions. I'm very lousy to write any fairytales, even as a metaphor for something more realistic.

So yes, Absolute Key is a way to process my emotions, but there are many twists and turns along the way. The first vision/emotion/thought can be very faint and abstract, like a ghost or a mirage, and then I start to turn it into sounds; sometimes it happens very easily, sometimes it slips through my fingers, sometimes it becomes something else than at the beginning, and sometimes I can't even remember or understand what the starting point was and how it resonates in a final product. There are moments of clarity, desperation, aberration... So the process is that "escape," but the root is firmly connected to my actual life.

Speaking of process... you already mentioned that you work in bursts. So, how often you have these creative bursts and how much do you create when you have one? Are all of those fruits shared with the rest of us?

Well, it is hard to say what the normal rhythm is for these bursts... Too fast, someone could cry if you go through my discography, haha! Sometimes – especially when I have an idea of a full-length with a certain theme – I make lots of plans on paper and in my mind before starting to work with the actual music. But nowadays I have been collecting lots of field recordings and other sound sources from abandoned houses, tool sheds, nature etc. and there can be a long gap between those recordings and the actual moment when I start to go through them, manipulate them and build them into "real" songs. So although the burst itself can be very intense, there are also times when I just let the whole thing sleep and get back to it after some time. There are a few sleeping beauties that are waiting to be released – or not. I have tried to learn some self-criticism and self-censorship after all.

Regarding self-criticism and self-censorship, do you feel there's a need for them? Of course those can be used accordingly to retain the certain standard, but have you felt lately there's an increasing need for them?

I have always been quite quick when it comes to my doings. As I mentioned before, I have this strong vision, and then I just try to execute it in some way using those technical and musical skills I have – and those skills are quite sparse after all, haha! So sometimes I could work harder and sharpen my outcomes, to be honest. On the other hand, I have always been fascinated by this idea of a sketch: that you just seize the moment and make a rather improvised and instinct-led draft of your idea. Not too much polishing or pondering. Of course, in this case, it helps if you know your weapons and what you are doing. Especially in noise it's important to get your sound right. Sometimes the sound is even more important than the form, if you know what I mean. If you stand on firm

ground, it doesn't matter what kind of dance moves you are doing. In my case, the dance moves are there, but they are performed in a bit of a of a shaky manner sometimes. But that's how I am, and usually I am satisfied with the output. And that is what matters most.

Regarding that, what kind of a feedback have you received? I haven't read any reviews of your specific pieces of work, but as a whole there seems to be... "buzz" might not be a right term, regarding the nature of Absolute Key's music, but some appreciation and recognition, at least!

It feels like it has been quite quiet when it comes to my releases and the feedback I get about them. Not so much positive or negative criticism. I guess I am a "mediocre" artist; as I mentioned before, my nature is to be "jack of all trades but master of none", and this wide stylistic variety of my music results in that I don't shine on any level, haha! But I am fine with this, because, as the typical saying goes, I do this for myself, and if I am happy with the results, that's enough. Of course I am interested in feedback, and sometimes I may start to think things differently and try to sharpen my style (especially in the case of my live performances), but usually the feedback is quite trivial for me. I am my own best and worst critic.

It's true that people don't often give feedback, at least in constructive fashion. It's usually "FUCKING GREAT" or "this sucks". I know what you mean by saying you're doing this for yourself and yourself only, but sometimes people opt to keep their doings strictly to their own ears, eyes or other sensory organs. Since you do publish your creations, there is some desire to share your work with the others, anyway?

The ageless question about art and its purposes... What if all the painters, writers, performers, and musicians kept their creations to themselves? What kind of world would that be? I think art needs its receivers in general; many artists have something to say (at least I hope this is the case), be it emotions, political opinions, or something else. In my case, I try to understand this world around me through my art, and I want to share my revelations and finds with my audience. I want the radiance that is resonating in me to continue its journey in others. And although I just said that the audience's reviews and comments don't touch me so much, I'm always interested in how the audience hears or sees my art, what kind of ideas it raises in them, and so on – if you get this difference?

I am not into praises or barks, but I want to hear what kind of vibrations my art creates. But of course there are countless other little reasons why I don't keep my music on my hard drive; for example, there is a certain need to belong to a scene, especially a noise scene. You go to see gigs, you get some ideas and inspiration, you want to push yourself forward, you want to give something back. The noise scene in Finland is quite small after all, so there are no leaders and followers, but everyone is on the same line and there is no need to please anyone. And of course I have to admit that every artist has its own egoist tripping somewhere in the shadows.

Speaking of the scene... noise scene might be small, but it has multiple faces and people approach noise in whole different ways. And the face of the whole scene has changed, which is, of course, only natural progression. What do you think of the contemporary noise scene of Finland?

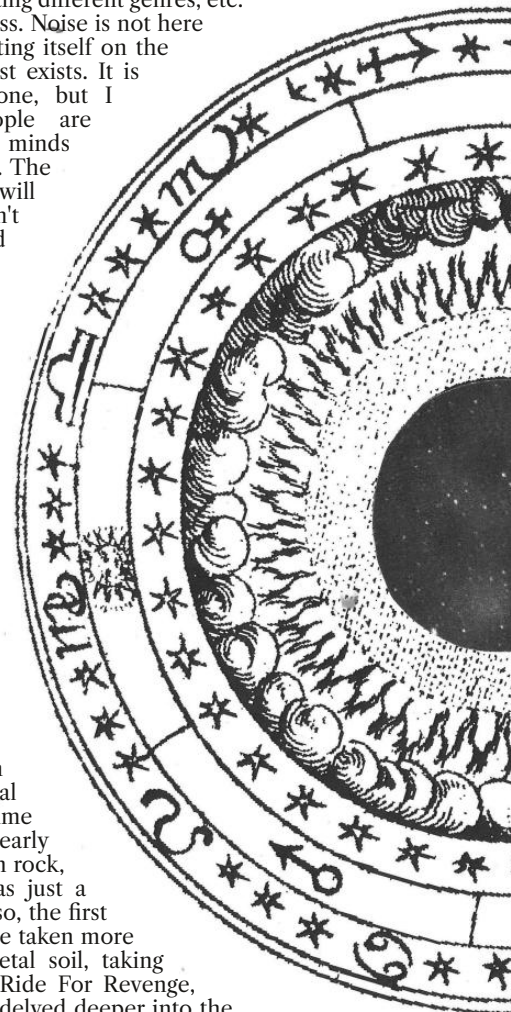
It's a small circle, definitely, but very unified and dedicated. People are ready to travel long distances for the shows, and you can see familiar faces at different gigs all around Finland. You could argue that things are going

quite inbred, but I would say the whole situation is rather fertile: artists get inspired by other artists and their shows, every time there are a few curious spectators more present, and so on. I wouldn't talk about hype or a phenomenon (yet!), but things are progressing—or at least I feel that way, as a newbie.

There has also been talk about the elitist nature of the Finnish scene: because the music – and some of the other themes around it – appear to be so extreme, you could assume that the artists raise themselves above the typical music consumers. "You can't handle/understand this, but we can!" But I would say we are talking more about being outcasts and outsiders than being elitists. Noise is quite detached from everything else musically, so the comparisons or putting different genres, etc. on the line are quite useless. Noise is not here to impress anyone or putting itself on the top of the shelf; noise just exists. It is not definitely for everyone, but I wouldn't say that people are closing doors for curious minds and acting as gatekeepers. The time and noise itself will uproot the weeds, so I don't think that we should somehow protect noise. We will always remain outsiders, after all.

I think noise is abrasive enough for it to need anyone else to protect it... I think noise has raised its head above the underground a few times, only to dive back into the depths. What was your first subjection to noise?

I didn't listen to so much noise when I started Absolute Key. I have been interested in weird and experimental music for a long time (krautrock, Current 93's early recordings, ambient, psych rock, etc.), but actual noise was just a distant shadow for me. Also, the first steps of Absolute Key were taken more on an industrial/black metal soil, taking influences from Beherit, Ride For Revenge, and acts like that. Later I delved deeper into the harsher ways of music, but it's hard to say or remember what the first contact was... Maybe Haare compilation box or some trade tapes from Narcolepsia and likes. As I mentioned before, I am quite a beginner when it comes to noise, and because the stylistic scale is so wide, it feels like you can always find more and more interesting artists with interesting approaches. One funny thing – at least for me – is that these new acts hit as hard as the old legends, and I haven't even gotten to know all the big names of the scene. For example, I don't have any Merzbow albums on my record shelf. Is it comparable to a situation where you are playing a heavy metal band but you don't listen to Iron Maiden, hahaha! Of course, I have also noticed already that all noise isn't for me – it can result from the actual music or lyrical/thematic content – and I'm fine with that. As a noise artist, I am quite divergent too. And noise is also music that I want to witness live. A harsh noise gig can be something that I can enjoy at the highest volume, but I rarely listen to



harsh noise at home. The "villasukka" acts are usually a safer choice for home listening sessions.

Yeah, I prefer the villasukka noise as well. I got first exposed to noise a long ago, and works of Haare were among those which inspired me... and Umpio as well. I do own some Incapacitants album, but no Merzbow is occupying my shelf, either, although I did listen to his albums quite a lot when I first got into noise. I can imagine owning some of his albums, though. But these "big boys in the scene" have told that there is actually no proper way to consume, produce or get swallowed into noise. Actually, one noise enthusiast claimed that introduction to noise thru some mandatory "gates" or "Top noise albums you should start with" is something that makes the whole thing a bit of a chore and one-dimensional, and this applies more to noise than to some other genres.

Yeah, the whole concept of noise is so abstract and absurd that it is hard to imagine finding one specific gate to enter the realm of noise.

I can remember my feelings when I was listening to heavy metal for the first time: role-playing games, a fascination with imagination and the unnatural, a need to find something dangerous, and so on. Then thrash metal, death metal, black metal... And then something else. Of course, these same aspects are in noise too – going over the edge, for example – but when all those other genres have been at least somehow logical and connected to my inner thoughts and emotions, noise is something very amorphous. Sometimes, when you are listening to some obscure noise tape, you even wake up and start wondering why I am listening to this! Why am I torturing my ears with this? Do I even like this? But at the same time, something on that tape is rocking your boat, and you get swallowed up in that dark world of sound. In "normal" music, it is easy to analyze and categorize the whole: here are the guitars, here are the drums, this is the verse, this is the chorus, and so on, but in noise, you are quite often chasing a ghost in a nightly forest and trying to describe something indescribable. And this all makes it so fascinating. The same thing happens in my own doings: when I listen to my own recordings, I get a bit baffled quite often while wondering where all these sounds are coming from. There is always a mysterious X factor affecting the background.

One thing I love about noise is the endless stream of possible interpretations. Of course, I think all of us have these occasional and random "What choices I have made in my life which have lead up to this very moment in which I'm washing my ears with this racket, which is essentially nothing but noise but it's still captivating and very, very lovely" moments in life, but at the same time you construct the image of that soundscape that is drilling into your psyche.

That image seems to be a whole lot different with every noise work you come across, and I don't think I have got the same image twice.

And you can choose a different approach every time, even if you listen to the same record. For example, you can dissect the sound sources and different layers, or you can try to see the abstract sound as images in your mind. Or you can do something else. Or you can just enjoy the ride. Of course, this can happen with normal music too, but as said before, because noise is such an abstract genre, it allows different interpretations. It's like abstract art: as many are the spectators, as many are the ways to observe (and then there are those people who think it is not art/music at all with their "anyone could do that" statements). However, I don't want to say here that all noise would be somehow "difficult" music; noise can be very straightforward and simple (and quite often it is like that), so there is no use in trying to dig up some deep purposes. Then you can definitely just enjoy the ride. You can choose your weapons of interpretation. Another fine characteristic of noise.

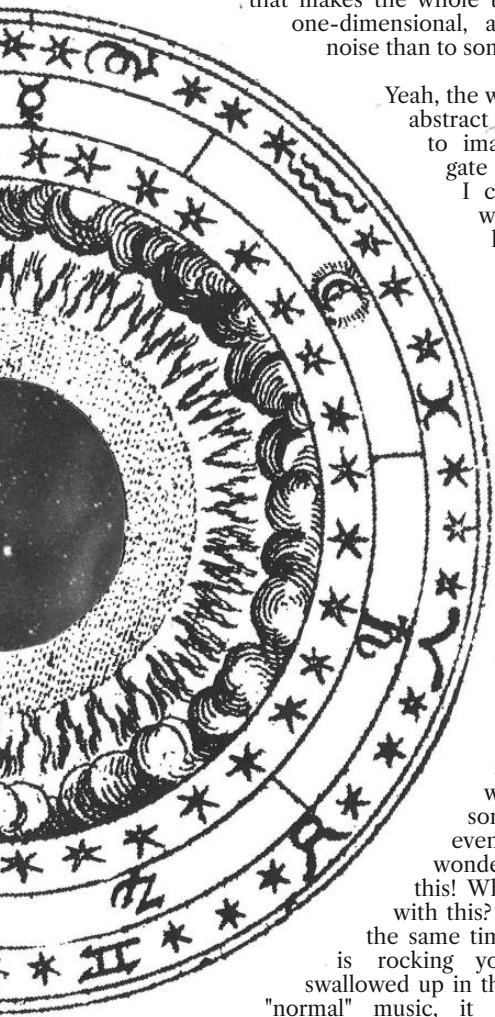
I don't think noise is difficult in a way some forms of progressive rock are, if you want to simplify difficulty into songs, that have many parts in it, instrumental virtuosity and out-of-the-ordinary time signatures... but on the other hand, I think there's a difference between Yes and the works of Robert Wyatt, for an example. The difficulty with noise relies on the abrasive soundscape and sometimes the imagery... but, then again, people utilize white noise to help their infants to get some sleep.

Yes, the one distinctive difference is that of virtuosity or skills, or how you want to put it. I may repeat myself, but noise is based on DIY esthetics and the "can't play, don't care" attitude, where the imagination is the only barrier – or maybe your own mental/aesthetic restrictions. When things go really far, we are talking about the most extreme music, and at least personally, I have to ponder now and then, if my music is too extreme, can people listen to this and so on. I don't mean that I would soften my approach specifically, but as I said before, my songs are quite structured, even composed, so it would feel somehow forced or artificial to push myself over the edge just because I try to make the most extreme sound I could do.

So, if progressive rock is challenging because of the compositions or the artist's superior skills, noise is challenging because of the sound itself. A normal artist is free to do what he/she wants when he/she masters his style and instrument. A noise artist is free when he/she opens his/her mind and understands that everything is possible. Again, I don't say here that noise music doesn't need any talent or skills, but the first step is more mental than pragmatical.

Speaking of talent and skills, what kind of a talent you think "good" noise requires, if one has gotten past the mental barrier first? Perhaps some sort of inspiration or devotion to noise?

Devotion is one word for it. For me personally, it helps to keep your eyes and especially ears open for any kinds of sources of inspiration, be it music I hear around me or some bleeps, hisses, sounds of nature, construction work areas, or something else. I just came from my morning swim, and I was encountered by trains passing by, ripples of waves, one guy using a rock drill, and so on. Well, I don't know if this is a "talent" per se, but at least you can turn everything around you into possible music by recording and manipulating it or duplicating it with your instruments. So we can talk about some sort of devotion; to be possessed and fixated by the sound itself. And true



masters become connoisseurs of the sound; they hunt for a perfect version of it, they can recognize the slightest differences and they know how to use their instruments to achieve the sound they are after. I am not on that level yet – as said before, I am a man of visions, but I may settle for too little when it comes to the actual execution – but I'm progressing all the time.

Sounds like photography, in a way. Vision and execution could be far away from each other, and it certainly requires something to make those ends meet. Also, at some point you view your surroundings in a completely different way, at least I've had phases of interpreting different lightning situations and making calculations for the correct exposure settings in my head, even if I didn't had a camera with me.

Yes, at least I have personally started to observe my surroundings differently. Of course, not every noise artist uses field recordings and source sounds like this, but this works fine in my case. It's easy to record some interesting sounds with your phone, and sometimes I take certain "noise walks" with my Zoom recorder in my pocket, aiming purposefully at old abandoned houses, construction work areas, and so on. But contrary to your thoughts about photographing, usually I don't have any clear idea at this point about how to use these recordings. The vision and the source material get entangled later, when I start to build the songs at home with my equipment. Then I go through my files and tapes and try to find suitable sounds in the right places – or then record something totally new with synths, etc. The whole working process is a mix of coincidence and intentional, clear work. Sometimes things click very easily, sometimes not. Sometimes the solution is found in a very surprising direction, almost by accident; sometimes it's a hard road with several attempts, organizing and re-organizing, and so on. Although many noise artists may trust their instincts and the fresh charm of the first take, for me "kill your darlings" is a suitable guideline, at least in some way.



No one said you should publish all of your material, anyway, as most of it can be buried in an unmarked grave for your... rehearsal work. "Kill your darlings" is certainly a familiar approach from the world of creative writing. Speaking of which, how much Absolute Key's world is about creative writing? Words for human comprehension?

Unfortunately in my case all my visions are quite unique, so it's not like I would sharpen my dagger a release after a

release – I almost have a new dagger in my hand in every release! However, there are some releases that were done quite spontaneously and in a blink of an eye, and afterwards I have come to the conclusion that the idea wasn't strong enough to carry a public, "real" release, and therefore those creations were buried in the deepest cellars of my hard drive.

So I was a bit lying when I said I have a "kill your darlings" mentality. There are so many sides and faces in Absolute Key, and I feel a need to show all these sides to an audience – hence the quite hasty release pace. But on the other hand, when I work rather fast and instinctively, I have to come back to the songs quite often and perfect them little by little, and sometimes I paint myself to the corner where I understand that the actual idea of the song was crappy and I delete the whole thing.

But what comes to the latter part of your question, as you know me, I am a man of words – I have worked several years with my fanzines, and I have written tons and tons of lyrics for my band Circle Of Ouroboros. So the words and lyrics are very important for me, and in the beginning of Absolute Key, it was obvious that there would be lyrics on those songs too. The first releases were quite traditional and full of "real" songs, so I included lyrics there too. It felt too abstract to make only instrumentals, but with time I have also released albums – mostly closer to pure noise – that don't have any lyrics or vocals. But I think I have something else to say to just transfer sounds to an audience. First Absolute Key was some sort of a counterpart against Circle Of Ouroboros's quite dreamy and soft content: there were stories about anguish, physical and spiritual pain, dark revelations, and so on. I wanted that the lyrics mirror the black and rotten character of the music in the best possible way. But later, these softer sides have sneaked into the world of Absolute Key too now and then. For example, many releases have been inspired by abandoned buildings and different kinds of wastelands (soundscapes, history, atmosphere, etc.), so some of the lyrics have been dealing with the themes of loss, decay, degradation, longing, and so on. Also, the variety of topics has widened: the split with Ahulabrum dealt with an imaginary story about the person who gets swallowed into the world of cabin fever and supernatural entities, and then there will be this concept album coming in the future that has a strong anti-war message. So imagination, reality, my own thoughts and visions, everything entangled together.

But I wouldn't say that the words or lyrics are the source of primal inspiration quite often. Almost every time the sound and the songs come first, then the lyrics. And I have noticed that when I'm doing pure instrumental songs, it's usually really hard to come up with good song titles! This has been very interesting and sometimes frustrating to notice. Maybe I am so used to working with lyrics, and when I don't have them in my hands, it's difficult to squeeze all the music into one title.

Now that you mentioned Circle Of Ouroboros, how do you think Absolute Key differs from that entity, apart from operating in a different genre and with the other person sharing the responsibilities? Yes, you said that Absolute Key started as a counterpart to Circle Of Ouroboros, but I could think that at least some parallels with it would exist?

Well, of course the biggest difference is that I'm handling only the lyrics, vocals, and occasional artwork in Circle Of Ouroboros, and in Absolute Key I'm in charge of everything. But some similarities have emerged here and there with time. For example, Absolute Key's album "The Third Level of Decay" had some more guitar-driven tracks that could have had something common with Circle Of Ouroboros, just in a noisier way. Also, I could say that the lyrics of Absolute Key have dragged them

little by little closer to the world of Circle Of Ouroborus, at least when I am living my most tender moments, heh. And that's just natural; it's me behind both of these creations, and also Absolute Key has expanded its variety and scale all the time, so it is just logical that some elements have been soaked from Circle Of Ouroborus to Absolute Key.

And one thing that came to mind is the open-minded attitude toward the music. Circle Of Ouroborus has always been breaking barriers inside black metal, for example (and we will do that in the future too, believe me!), and I have followed this path in Absolute Key. I don't want to be a pure noise artist or a pure industrial/BM artist or something else. I am confident in what I am doing and what is the pure core of Absolute Key, so this confidence gives me possibilities and freedom to discover new territories.

If my memory serves me right, I recall you being somewhat new to playing guitar and that was the origins for the Rotten Moon project. That's another story for another day, but how do you approach guitar in the context of Absolute Key?

Well, if MY memory serves me right, I have used guitar on Absolute Key albums only a few times, and all these features have been quite traditional. The guitar was in its most prominent role on that "The Third Level of Decay" album, which was maybe the closest to traditional metal music: very primitive drum machine stomps, then some guitar noise that can be described as "riffs" at its best, and then synths, screeches, and general sound chaos into the mix. Besides that, I played guitar on a few songs on the "Kevään muoto" album to create a folky atmosphere, and there is one song on the Ahulabrum split tape ("Psychic Hideout"), which is heavily inspired by Lifelover and their almost pop-like guitar jangle. But if you were after if I had used guitar in a more unconventional way in Absolute Key, the answer is 'no' for now. My skills are very limited - I started to play guitar only three years ago, and I have been too lazy to learn any notes, etc., so usually I am just strumming it, traditional punk-style. But maybe in the future I will make a long pedal chain, get drunk and release my inner Jimi Hendrix, and create something totally out-of-this-world guitar noise, haha! In general, I am interested in using more traditional instruments on noise, like kantele, drums, flutes, kalimba, etc. It brings an organic touch to everything and adds that more musical approach that I am often after.

Well, I was thinking of unconventional way of playing it when I asked that question, but noise is a stream of endless possibilities, right? Speaking of which, do you think there are any wrong ways to do it? Some methods or instruments that certainly are a no-no for you?

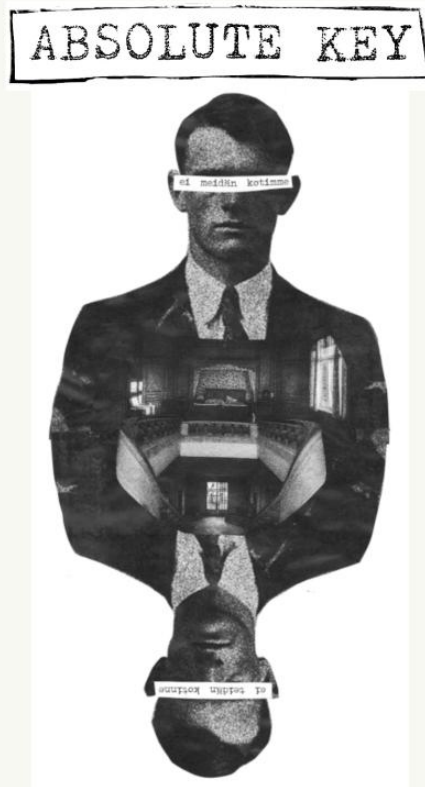
Well, I am not that person to say how to do things and what is restricted. In general - not only in noise - I believe that the stylistic barriers are quite useless. You can make good and shitty traditional music and also good

and shitty experimental music. And if we take a little sidestep, for example, in black metal, people seem to think that these experimental bands would somehow stain the legacy and soul of black metal if they don't stay in the line. As black metal would be something that could be touched and ruined by the acts of these bands. Maybe this is a bit too high-flown and romantic idea, but the fact is that bands come and go, but the essence of black metal stays in its own sphere. But let's get back on earth and to noise: yes, noise has endless possibilities. The whole nature and starting point of the genre was to question the laws and descriptions of music, so why would this genre start to restrict itself? Of course, even in noise you can find these guys and gals who despise rhythmic and industrial elements, but I am jumping here and there happily as a rabbit. However, you can't catch a fox and say it's a rabbit, so there are some key elements that make noise noise, but the ways to express that core are many. And after being a music reviewer for years and years, I am quite tired of labeling music to different boxes. There is that core, but it is something so abstract and indescribable, so you can't start making any specific and concrete pigeonholing, in my opinion. Or at least that is not a game I want to play.

This seems to be a mindset that is shared a lot of people today, as you can see the same people attending metal, noise and punk shows. And I think that's just great. Of course, there are people who are into a certain music style and not much anything else. But somehow, you are mostly involved with black metal even to a point that you have done collaborative work with black metal acts, such as Hail Conjurer and Starcave Nebula. Somehow it always comes back to black metal...

Well, I have been into black metal for over 20 years, so it has been one natural starting point when it comes to my noise activities too. Also, if I think about it now and generalize things a bit, you can see some sort of a common ground between the lone one-man black metal bands and noise artists, both transforming their own individual visions into a musical form. And if you have listened to the Noisecast podcast, it seems that many noise artists have a black metal background. I have just dragged my black metal roots to the noise world more effectively, and I still think that both of these genres can evoke the same kind of violent darkness and uncomfortable soundscapes. Personally, I would like to see more of these genre-piercing collaborations and crossover gigs, where noise artists, punk bands, and metal groups share the same stage. Gladly this has happened now and then - for example, Meluhelvetti in Joensuu, where I also had the opportunity to make some additional noise for Warfare Noise - and Absolute Key has been on the same bill with Godflesh, Discharge, Skepticism, and so on.

When you collaborate with other artists, do you "adjust" Absolute Key to better align with them? For an example, do you think there's a distinct difference between the split releases with Haare or Hail Conjurer? Or when you record something for the



split as opposed to doing something live?

I rarely have ready songs in my back pocket for the split albums. I start to work with the songs after the deal is sealed, and yes, quite often I have the other band and their style and character in my mind when making my own part. This doesn't mean that I try to copy the other band's style or force my own expression to some sort of mold, but I like that there is some kind of coherence or unity on these splits. After all, Absolute Key can be many things, so I don't have any difficulties making more rhythmic or metal songs for one split album and more ambient material for another. And in many cases, there has also been collaboration between me and the other half; for example, on "Trident and Vision" with Hail Conjurer, we made the first and last song of that album together, and on Ahulabrum split, I added some synth and percussion to two Ahulabrum songs, and I got some guitar tracks and junk noise in return. And for the Edasi split, we made the art work together. I like these even small acts of cooperation; it wraps things together nicely.

And when you mentioned the live gigs, that's another story. It's hard to transfer some of my albums to the stage, so I have had to do different kinds of changes and solutions for playing live. Actually, I have four different live sets for different kinds of situations: one more traditional BM/industrial set, one mellow electro/ambient/poem set, one droney set, and one noise set. And then there is this Hail Conjurer / Absolute Key collaboration set too. I have found this solution suitable for me because Absolute Key has so many faces, and I want to make them all audible in different situations. I want to have the possibility to perform in quiet art galleries and at crusty metal clubs. Someone could shout now, "Focus man, god damn, focus!" but that is not my nature. I want to make different kinds of albums. I want to perform in different kinds of places. I want to collaborate with different kinds of artists.

Can you further elaborate on your collaboration with Hail Conjurer? It seems to be somewhat deeper than just doing one split and then forgetting about it, since you already have done two of them and you have even performed together.

I already liked Mr. HC's other activities in Horse Latitudes and Ride For Revenge, but Hail Conjurer's debut album "Dreams of Serpent" (2018) made a big impression on me – music was barbaric and primitive but still somehow profound and astral. As I described in my album review, it is like a caveman watching to the sky and stars and tries to understand what this whole universe is all about.

Five years ago we both had a gig in St. Petersburg, and we became good friends – we both come from the eastern parts of Finland and we share the same kind of humour and open-mindedness on many things inside and outside of music. And being both solo artists and making black metal (or black metal-related music in my case) in a bit different way, we made a good pair when it comes to gigs and touring. So we played at the same gigs now and then. In 2020 there were plans for a little tour in Central Europe, and we made a special tour split 7" for that. Well, the tour didn't happen, but that 7" was released still and all.

During the COVID years I recorded some songs that were a bit different compared to typical Absolute Key style – hollow and cold, drum machine-driven material – and because I wanted to have a totally new start for these songs, I asked Hail Conjurer to record vocals. So Absava was born. The first demo, "Värahtelyjä kynnyksellä," came out in 2020, and the full-length "Kaikkiallinen – Kosminen – Tajunta" in 2020. With this full-length, the music got weirder and more psychedelic, as did Hail Conjurer's vocals too. We have some new material in making, and it is again something different. Yes, I have difficulties staying still.

But back to our main story. Later, maybe in 2022 or 2023, Hail Conjurer came up with this idea about doing a collaboration album.

The ambient/synth elements were taking a bigger role on his albums, so I guess we wanted to see if we could find common ground on the same record. So we both made one particular song and then three collaboration songs, which were more noise/drone/ambient oriented. This album, "Trident and Vision", is quite an experimental piece of work because, although it has these separate songs, even those are showing a new side of us, in my opinion. After we got the album done, it felt natural to try how we can invoke the same feeling on stage, and so there have also been collaboration gigs now and then – the next one is in October in Spain, with Mortuary Drape and other

BM acts. If we are playing at the same shows, why not play together too occasionally? And I have loved these collaboration gigs – when you perform only solo, it can become a bit lonely at some point, so it has been refreshing to have another lunatic raising hell with you on stage. We both are quite passionate performers, and there is always a feel of danger and improvisation in the air.

How about your relationship with Haare, then? You have done some collaboration as well, albeit not on a similar magnitude than with Hail Conjurer.

I've known Ilkka for a long time, and as I mentioned before, Haare was one of "gate" bands to the kingdom of noise in one way for me. I especially have enjoyed his later works; for example, "Brain" from 2020 was one of the highlights of that year. So I asked him to do a split album with Absolute Key, and I think it went well. "Undercurrents" was released by Disclosures in 2021, and it included quality trademark drone hymns from Haare and a mish-mash trio of songs from me.

I don't know if it was this split or what, but then Ilkka asked me to join in Haare's live line-up. As you know, he was doing music with talented Janne Martinkauppi in Haare for a long time, and now he needed more synth layers for the live sound. The first gig was in Jättömaa Festival 2022, where we performed as a



duo without Janne, and after that we have thrown maybe five gigs together. There was also one studio session at some point, and if I remember right, some bits and pieces of that were used on the "Submagic" album (2023).

We have quite an easygoing attitude in Haare, not stressing too much and not rehearsing too much either, haha. Ilkka and Janne have so much mileage behind them and talent in their pockets, so those psychedelic drone frequencies can be reached quite easily. And my part, well, I just go with the flow, trying to add my own element to the big picture. I guess it has gone well because they haven't kicked me out yet! The next gig is in Lepakkomies, Helsinki, on the 29th of September with Bryskt, Oksennus, and Truth Commission, and I will perform solo as well there. It's a fundraising show for the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre, so a good opportunity to enjoy noise and do some good too!

Yeah, that gig is definitely interesting and I'm thinking about it, even if the Sunday gigs can be a hell if you have something to do on Monday. Anyway, it seems you have "gained the respect" from the elder statesmen of noise, so I guess you can now pat your back. Are there any other collaborations you are a part on a similar level?

Nothing so intense and versatile. There have been some very satisfying collaborations like the splits with Utarm and Edasi, where we did the album artwork together, changing drawings and sketches back and forth, and of course there is this future collaboration album with Austrian black metal / punk band Bränd where we have made the songs more or less totally together: for example, I have made some sort of background loop first, then the Bränd guy has maybe played some drums and guitars on it, and after that it has been my turn to add synths etc. This has been very interesting and eye-opening because we approach those songs from different angles, but we still have the same vision. The process has been very smooth and natural, and our minds and ideas have been clicked quite easily.

So, overall, I want to make split albums with artists with whom I share at least something common. Of course, the process doesn't have to be so intense and groundbreaking, but it has to be somehow... satisfying. Not just two sides of songs glued together. It doesn't mean that the artists are on the same level musically, but they have to complete each other somehow. As I mentioned before, the work as a solo artist can be quite lonely sometimes, so these split albums and collaborations bring welcomed change to the picture.

So, you could say split albums and other collaborations should have some depth in them

instead of just putting something on the same release?

At least I try to get some depth in my doings. Of course, I have done and will do plain split albums, but also in those releases, I try to think a bit about the character and atmosphere of that other artist and adjust my songs to the right mood and level. But this depth can be reached in many ways, so sometimes a simple split release without any gimmicks can hit the spot. Each to their own taste.

How about the visual side of Absolute Key? How much you give emphasis on constructing a certain "image"? I know that this field of life is something that matters to you tremendously.

As you may know, I have done lots of art work for Circle Of Ouroboros, and the same method has continued in Absolute Key's case too. I guess it all leans on working solo and DIY ethics. I may get better results by giving cover art duties to someone else's hands (and I have done it a few times, "Puut kantavat valoa" and "Lauluja laaksoista" albums, for example), but somehow I feel that the album represents myself and my vision better when I also do the art work by myself.

And the visual side is very important indeed. I could leave my songs on my hard drive or release them only on the Internet, but I think that the physical release completes the whole process, and the cover art is one piece of this completion. I have lived my youth in the world of heavy metal album covers: I have gone through every detail on the covers of Iron Maiden, Manowar, Anthrax, etc., trying to find hints and secret messages. So the art work isn't just a necessary evil but one crucial part of the whole. And it can work on so many levels: it can reflect the atmosphere of the album, it can give you some sort of key to the themes, it can create contrast compared to music, and so on.

From the first demo of Absolute Key, I found this collage technique (which is quite common in the noise genre), and it has been a very satisfying method for me; because I am not the greatest painter, I can skip one step and combine existing elements in my own, imaginative way. Of course, there have also been painted covers too, like on "To Leave to Return" and "Kevään muoto" albums, but that's because I wanted to have a more organic feeling to them.

The visual spectrum is as wide as the stylistic spectrum in Absolute Key. If I have to use colours, I use colours. If the album craves for harsh black and white obscurity, I will do something like that. Quite usually I don't do too concrete and clear works - there is this abstract, dream-like atmosphere present. And I have noticed that this is a quite typical approach in noise; when the music itself is very unformed and abstract, the same kind of art work suits best in that case. As in music, the listeners can make their own analyses and observations.

Do you feel there's something you strive to achieve, but haven't done so yet? Are there possibly more faces to Absolute Key we haven't seen yet?

It feels that I am just in the beginning of this path, at least





I feel that way. Maybe it's because I have been jumping from one style to another and I have so much to learn and so many rock to turn. If I had concentrate on one specific style for five years, the situation would be different and I maybe would feel myself as a veteran and expert of my genre, but now I feel myself just a newbie, haha. But it's hard to say if all the faces of Absolute Key have been unveiled already. That's for sure that new ideas and visions are popping to my head all the time when I witness a live show or hear new exciting music, so the urge to evolve and find new territories is strong. This doesn't mean that I want to copy anyone, but these live gigs for example give me new ideas how to do things, how to approach The Sound. When I started this journey with that little scruffy demo tape, I couldn't imagine that I will make a mellow sound poetry album. Or make a

collaboration release with Hail Conjurer. Or I have a chance to perform in UK, Germany, Portugal... World of noise is a world of wonders, so maybe there is a whole new kingdom waiting to be conquered?

As we concluded before, it's a stream of endless possibilities. I think that's all I have to ask. Thank you for the interview! If you have anything else to add, please free to do so.

I guess I have babbled enough. Read books. Go to gigs. Open your mind.

Funny and strange creatures live right under our feet. Obviously some abnormal reptiles with blatant emotion regulation issues and an appetite for malnutrition tend to their own business and shit, but this motley crew of green-skinned bandits are armed and know how to use those weapons of musical destruction. Kneel before the altar and meet the priests of grind, filth and malignity.

Meet

SEWER ALTAR



These guys right here.
They know their barbecue.





Hello! How's the life in the sewer?

K: Grimy, like life has a tendency of being, especially in these times.

So, I think we need to revisit the foundation of the band. How did it start? Who are the people involved and why these people?

K: I (Kalle, [guitars, backup vox]) always have all kinds of riffs waiting for the right band, and in the last couple years a lot of them have been stuff that would fit death metal, war metal, grindcore and powerviolence. I've been wanting for a long time to either put up a a) metallic hardcore band that I could finally just sing for without an instrument or b) just something faster, heavier and more bestial.

So seeing Sakke's (drums) post in the musicians' subforum of Punk in Finland about him having time for another band and loving James Read's drumming style was enough for me to reply and we went and tried a few rough drafts of songs I had. Things just kinda clicked right away. It didn't take too much thinking for me to ask V-A (lead vocals, bass) if he was interested, as I dig his vox in Remissions and thought they'd be perfect for something closer to death metal as well.

What was in your minds when you made decisions about your musical approach? Any particular bands or scenes you found inspirational? I don't know about you, but Repulsion was something that popped into my mind when I was listening to your demo.

K: The few initial tracks I had ready for this were kind of influenced by other bands that were also adventuring somewhere between hardcore, powerviolence, grind and death metal in their own different ways, for example Scalp, Jarhead Fertilizer, No/Más, Ingrown and Caustic Wound. Also recently I've been very much musically excited about the "new wave of Far Eastern extreme metal" (Tetragrammacide, Genocide Shrines etc.) though we don't sound anything like those bands. And of course classics like Repulsion, the first Brutal Truth album, Terrorizer (for me that's World Downfall), Despise You, Infest, Bolt Thrower, Morbid Angel, early Napalm Death.

S. I love, whatshouldicallit, "one-foot blast beat grindcore" -stuff that's on the verge of technical but crosses back to the techniques utilized more in hardcore punk? So music like early Napalm Death, Siege, Repulsion, but also grindy black metal like the almighty Revenge, Sect Pig, and noisecore-oriented bands like Kapala all play a key-part in inspiring the sound of the band. At first I imagined something with more war metal-influences, but that's just on me for being a total sucker for bestial mayhem; in the end, the end-product turned out just the way it's supposed to be – even though I'm kinda poor at drums so I have to resort to double-footing it 90% of the time.

How would you describe your music? You have referred to it as hardcore, death metal and grindcore. Is some of these elements more prevalent to others?

K: Death metal riffage and growls with beatdowns, rolled into quick and to the point songs that definitely take cues from PV and grind. I guess you could sum it up as deathgrind with some hardcore thrown in. I can't get completely rid of heavy hardcore, whatever it is I set to do.



Sakke: Grindy hardcore. That's how I usually describe it.

If I got it right, you intended to do something different, but ended up having those familiar elements in your sound anyway. I'm referring to some similarities with The Reality Show when it comes to riffs and some song structures. Is it a vicious circle or a strenght?

K: I can only speak for myself, but like I said earlier, some vibes just stick with me naturally when writing heavy, distorted music. TRS started basically as Clevo and Hamilton hardcore worship, and some metal influences kept slowly creeping in there. Now I felt like Sewer Altar was supposed to go along fast DM/grindcore/war metal lines, but the more moshable stuff just sounded to me like it naturally belongs in that super pissed off mix as well. I don't really worry about repeating myself or think I'm having a "musical career" that needs to develop, I just keep making the kind of stuff I'd like to hear more. I don't really hear the similarities you mentioned, but I'm probably deaf to it myself.

So far you have published just the demo with six songs in it. How would you describe that demo? Is it a "best of" your works so far – you know, a collection of songs you thought that would represent Sewer Altar the best possible way. Or was there a specific structure or a general idea in mind when you put it together?

K: We basically had a day and a half, and set up to record as much as we could manage in that time. We tracked drums and a live guitar for ten songs, then recorded bass lines and picked the songs to properly finish. The ones that ended on the demo were probably the ones we had rehearsed together most up to that point, but I think pretty much any 4-6 tracks from that session would have been as good an introduction to what we're doing.

How about the lyrics, then? Ville, your other bands have had a somewhat deeper or more thought out approach to lyrics than just shouting "everything sucks". Of course that's important as well and that stream of thought can be found in your lyrics too, but the approach isn't at least entirely superficial. Are there any parallels with Remissions lyrics or is there a new approach to write them?

V-A: I needed to come up with some kind of a fresh inspirational concept for Sewer Altar since writing lyrics can get laborious in the long run. What I came up with was an infusion of sociopolitical issues such as class oppression, poverty, societal stigmatization – all the lived and experienced "street level" scourges of today – and imaginaries from horror and more conventional death metal stuff. It's not meant to be highly intellectual. I try to make up some distance between Sewer Altar and my other stuff.

Your lyrics seem to deliver strong messages. Of course, all of us can google them and make their own interpretations of them, but I guess we need to give at least some briefing about your lyrical content. So, what are the topics you are exactly dealing about?

K: I think the promo we've been sending around gives a somewhat apt description: "Lyrically, SEWER ALTAR delves into death metal themes of defilement and horror, intertwining them with the pervasive malaise of sociopolitical inequality. SEWER





ALTAR reclaims the societal irreverence and paranoia aimed at the lower classes, embracing it as a spiritual totem." As much as this kind of music works as a vent for myself, for others it should work as fight songs and wake-up calls to see how fucked up shit is getting all around us.

Lyrical topics about society are not a new phenomenon to death metal. Master, Dying Fetus, Misery Index... has death metal distanced itself from real-life topics, since even those bands have never been "the hottest" in the scene? What do you think? Should there be more "real-life" topics in death metal?

V-A: I don't find myself lamenting over some lack of societal commentary in death metal and I have no inclination to tell anyone what there should or should not be, as long as it's not some totally uninteresting creeping fascist agenda. I fully enjoy Formulas and Gateways era Morbid Angel and its cosmic scale or something ridiculous like old Carcass lyrics. But like you said, social issues are part and parcel of death metal, especially on the grounds where grindcore and death metal meet and I feel like that's how it should be.

Speaking of escapism, one of the reasons behind doing Spectrum of Circles was escapism. Apart from the all the other reasons for doing this, it was also a counter reaction to Gaza situation; not to put your head into sand, but to direct your thoughts to something completely different for a while. Do you need escapism and munch out on gore, intestines, the undead and the otherworldly entities?

V-A: I enjoy the kind of horror that doubles as clever social commentary. Not in some far-fetched metaphorical way like gore having a higher meaning, but through vivid depictions of moods and environments. I've been revisiting good old Clive Barker. He shifts from the mundane to the weird, from sensory excitement to paranoia, all of which capture the full range of human experience. Many horror artists focus on the uncanny parts of lived reality. I respect bending the perspective.

A psychiatrist who worked with people with traumatic childhoods once told me how people who grow up in harsh realities often develop inner worlds that mirror or surpass their surroundings. So, horror isn't always escapism; it can be an honest reflection of reality, representing fear, violence, and cruel and inescapable environments. If you want to get dystopian, just look around. The futuristic visions of technocratic cyberpunk metropolises with huge welfare gaps, digitalized labor, exploited peripheries, ecologic collapse... how far off does that sound? Sometimes coming into terms about what is reality these days requires imagination. We live in the remnants of a welfare state, but the idea of it is often stronger than the current situation. Even the neoliberal dream of hard work leading to stability and good life is collapsing. My home city recently reported a 44% rise in home evictions since our far-right government started dismantling welfare policies. Working homelessness is now a thing. I think it is time to seek and make up better words and imaginaries for the cut-throat society we occupy.

S: Gore and otherworldly horror, like V-A just said it, is a reflection of the anxieties and horrors we face in the real world. The themes that interest us do mirror the problems and fucked-up realities we face in our world, though they may at first glance seem just plain "escapism", as we put it. I don't know if it

was Tolkien or who said something about escapism being akin to freeing prisoners of war from the state of reality, "a civic duty to bring as many people along with you as you can"; even though that statement may bring forth the idea that we'd love to inhabit a reality like The Shire, when even in that reality there's the reality of the world at the brink of war over otherworldly power – even in fantasy Tolkien couldn't escape the harsh realities. The same goes true to our forms of escapism, be it dystopian or science-fiction oriented horror or more traditional body horror, something that takes and twists our image of humanity beyond what we consider human anymore.

When it comes to not only lyrics but the band activities in general, how important it is to have a channel like this to vent out whatever you want to squeeze out of your system? Does this have a sorts of therapeutical effect for you?

K: Music generally is a way for me to hold on to my sanity.

V-A: I see being part of the underground hardcore and metal scene as adding to an ongoing chemical reaction. It's not just about what you pour into it, but also what shit you stir up together and inhale along the way. The more I do band stuff, the more I tend to find inspiration. After all these years, putting together some crazy song with some friends is still magic.

S: The underground scene has proven to me to be an especially important source of vitality. Quoting Kalle, it's a way to hold on to my sanity, but there's also the social elements that come with creating art with others that really brings me new life while trudging through this otherwise meaningless existence.

Ville, you are also playing bass in Sewer Altar. Do you feel your presence on stage has changed because of that? Is it a new role to adapt to, given you were doing "only" vocals for End Begins and Remissions?

V-A: I've played guitar in some bands before, so playing an instrument isn't new to me. A few years ago, I was in a hardcore punk band called Laiton Uhkaus. We never recorded anything, but the few shows we played were fun times. The idea of 'stage presence' irritates me. Being a 'lead singer' feels like some fucked up egotistic nonsense, and it makes me want to quit. But I like the music and my bandmates too much. With Remissions, I cope by focusing on the weight of the sound. When I joined Sewer Altar, my condition was that I could play bass while doing vocals to hide behind an instrument haha. Turns out, I really enjoy it. I dig practicing bass and try to come up with clever lines. Doing it all live is demanding, but I enjoy the challenge and the physicality. I don't think much about 'presence'; I just give it everything I have. And try to make a little eye contact with the audience to maintain some level of human normalcy. I approach singing more through a death metal and grindcore lens now, whereas my past stuff has been more hardcore and punk.

There's two entirely different things my mind associated with Sewer Altar, and particularly the band name. The first association was Morbid Angel's "World of Shit"... and Sewer Altar's place in that system, as the final piece to process the shit. This is just a random thought, but I felt it was necessary to share it with you.

K: In a sense that's a somewhat familiar thought you have there. To me our songwriting feels







kinda like processing the negative shit that's poured on you every day and spewing it out as one or two minute outbursts of violence and hate. "Shit runs through the city's veins", like our namesake track goes.

S. It's the final stage where we all end up. It may sound sorta nihilistic, but in a way it's also humbling to me. We're all made up from the same ingredients, after all, hehe!

The other association is one with a lighter tone; Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Imagine, those guys live in sewers and worship martial arts and pizza. Also, your "mascot" could be from the live-action TMNT movie from 1990, or some Gremlins-like movies of that era. This was, again, a random thought!

K: Martial arts and pizza, yes please. The demo cover is from the 1986 hilariously crappy movie rendition of Clive Barker's Rawhead Rex. I don't clearly recall how the idea popped out and it felt a bit iffy at first, but it did inspire Ville to write the lyrics to Rawhead Flex, so we thought fuck it, let's just use it.

This one is also on lighter note: In case you call the only available photo of the three of you as a promotional picture, there's a barbecue with a couple of steaks on it. What kind of an importance does the barbecue activities hold in your life? Is that photo also a message to us not to take your band too seriously?

K: Hahaha we need to get some actual band photos taken asap. That "sad pic of two vegan patties for three guys" was a snap from our rehearsal space's backyard when we had some spare time to BBQ (yeah that's pretty important for the little time per year when it's enjoyable weather-wise) between rehearsal and the Sulfuric Cautery/Mephitic Corpse show starting next door, good times. Actually we're dead serious with what we're doing.

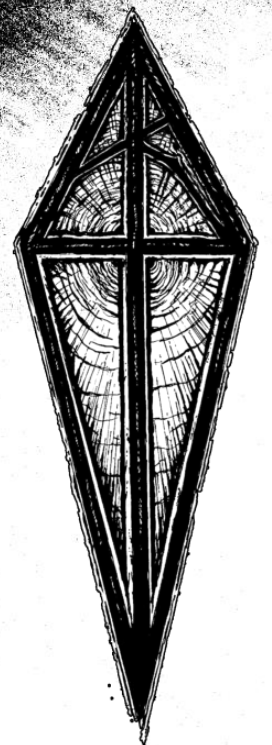
S. "Mincing the meat monger", as I called it. To me, it reminds of the picture of Order From Chaos featuring Pete Helmkamp posing with Santa Claus! There's nothing un-serious about that band or anything but even they could do something like that with a small twinkle in their eye. I think it was just a pure coincidence that that picture ended up on our Metallum-page* and as the "main" picture to represent us; feel free to hit us up if you want to become our PR-manager, haha!

I don't think I have nothing else to ask at the moment. Thank you for your time and all the best!





ASKEL



How to compress depression, anguish and pure existential horror into 33 minutes and 47 seconds? I guess you have to ask for tips from Askel how to replicate that, as far that is (in)humanely possible. The compressed product, aptly titled "Cycles of Ruin" really is a monumental testament of sludge with absolutely no light in sight.

Konsta (guitar) and Ossi (vocals) were looking at the bright side of life, thus quenching my thirst for answers... although I don't think I asked about that compression thing at all.

Hello! How are you?

Konsta: Hi, and well, you've heard our music, so I'm presuming the classic "fine, you?" would be better than the truth here.

Ossi: As far as band activity goes, we're in the midst of our busiest gig season so far, hitting Turku, Helsinki, Tallinn and Tampere in the course of just one month. That's a lot for us. We also have three new songs waiting to be recorded, which have already made their way to our live set. On top of that, Gate of Deliria just put out the "Findoomland" compilation LP of Finnish sludge to celebrate the label's 10th anniversary (Congrats! -Ed.), featuring three previously unreleased Askel tracks from the 2022 EP recording session. Good to have those out at last... or well, at least I can say that for the song "Nil", which we still play live from time to time.

I reckon the compulsory introduction sequence is needed. So, how did Askel take its first steps?

Konsta: We had finally buried my old band in late 2021, but I did happen to ask Miski to join on drums just before that to see if we'd at least manage to record some of the songs and not just have them lost to time. Didn't happen, but since I was already talking to Miski, asking if he was up for playing some sludge seemed pretty natural. I'd had an idea for the band for a while and I'd written a bunch of shitty two-riff songs over the years. Ossi didn't take much convincing and I think Henkka came to our third practice, so all in all, things came together rather smoothly.

Ossi: We had our first rehearsals in January 2022, hit the studio in July, and played our first gigs in September, so you could say we hit the ground running. I suppose it helped that none of us had other seriously active bands going on at the time.

How did you settle on the band name, Askel? A short Finnish word for "a step", and considering the overall concept of the band, it's hard to believe such a name would have been coined in order to just have a name. Are there deeper meanings behind the name?

Konsta: Also my fault, it's pretty much directly from my, at that time constant, suicidal ideation. When you stare at enough train tracks, cliffs, busy roads etc. with the thought of "I could just take one step right here and end it all" the least you can do is get a band name out of it, I guess? But yeah, the themes of suicide and depression were pretty much what I had in mind for lyrics as well, so it seemed fitting enough.

Ossi: I also find the idea of "being just one step away" inspiring in a wider sense. Life, sanity, morality and reality are fickle and fragile, even if the human mind tends to fool itself into an ignorant sense of safety.

The band name is in Finnish, but the song titles and

lyrics are in English. Of course, misery speaks in universal language, but there's a contrast. How come?

Konsta: The name was good but writing lyrics in Finnish without sounding corny is difficult? I don't know if there's more to it to be honest.

Did you have or do you have difficulties to express yourself in Finnish? It's the language we speak, but I can understand completely why it would be surprisingly difficult to use it, especially in a context such as this.

Konsta: Yeah, as noted, there's easily a layer of corniness or naivete that bugs me tremendously when writing in Finnish. I don't know if it's somehow easier to get over my self-criticism when writing in English due to some distance from the language, even if it is the main language I speak at home and work these days. Could also be that the texts that I go back to steal from have always been in English and it feels more natural due to that.

Ossi: On top of the points that Konsta mentioned, making fluent vocal arrangements with looong Finnish words is more challenging as well. I've used English actively in various contexts for pretty much my entire adult life, so writing lyrics in the language comes naturally. However, using Finnish remains an option, should the inspiration present itself in the future. Finnish has a unique power to it for sure, but the threshold to use it in lyrics is high.

Can you consider this kind of music to have therapeutic attributes? Or something on the contrary? Can the art of Askel become more of a burden sometimes?

Konsta: Anything can be a burden when you're good enough at stressing about stuff, but that's mostly the organising/managerial part of being in a band. The music itself definitely works more as a therapeutic outlet. If nothing else, you get to bash a guitar to the point the pickups cave in and call it "art".

Ossi: From an audience point of view, I can definitely say that music, or art in general, can have a therapeutic effect – at least it has been a significant source of comfort and a tool for self-reflection to me. I suppose someone could find the same in Askel, but personally, I don't consider doing this therapeutic or cathartic. Screaming about suicide or the end of the world doesn't make me yearn for those things any less, so it's a pretty dysfunctional coping mechanism. But if we get nerdy with terminology, I guess I could call this confrontational escapism, sublimation, or just plain wallowing.

There is a considerable amount of noise influence in Askel. How did you come up with the idea to combine noise in the first place?

Konsta: I feel like it's a pretty natural place to go when

you start wondering "how can we make this sound more abrasive and mean". Also just stealing ideas as usual, bands like Endon, The Body, Full of Hell, Gnaw Their Tongues etc. were on pretty heavy rotation for me at the time we started the band. Also, I was tired of pretending not to love the squealing feedback from a dimed out HM-2.

Do you think it adds something invaluable to... the art of Askel, instead of being just a side dish? Does it contribute to heaviness or the disturbed nature of the work of Askel?

Konsta: As a part of the overall sound, it's definitely pretty critical. Oppressiveness is probably the main feeling I wanna push with the music and having the wall of sound on at all times is one of the primary things driving

that home. Also makes the few moments where it eases off actually stand out. As its own instrument, I would like to incorporate it more, but that would require us to do some actual composing and thinking, but maybe we'll get around to it later.

Ossi: In the beginning, the noise was still more of a side dish, but it's already in a larger role on the LP and an essential element at gigs. My understanding of the noise gear actually remains very limited, so that adds a strong element of chaos in the mix, and the result turns out a bit different every time. But I guess that contributes to the unhinged feel of it all.

How do you think noise and sludge fit together? For example, Lähdön Aika, which explores similar themes but while their musical offerings are... easier to approach when compared to Askel, there are quite many similarities between the bands, at least on a spiritual level. Lähdön Aika has implemented the noisier elements too, but it's hard to imagine Weedeater experimenting with them, though!

Konsta: I feel like it's a pretty natural fit when you move away from the more stoner-adjacent side of sludge. To be honest, I feel it's incorporated in one way or another in most of the current sludge bands I care about the most. And then you have bands like Hautaus who just skipped the guitars completely for more focus on the noise, I truly love the two releases they've put out so far.

Ossi: I'm more interested in the expression of certain emotions or moods than in following the conventions of a particular genre, or meeting the expectations of some scene. As sludge and noise can often conjure similar vibes of aggression, chaos, hostility, oppression etc, I think the two make a fine match. Also, there is a kind of abstractly destructive and alienating quality to noise that goes beyond what can be achieved by just playing riffs with distortion, so it's a fitting additional tool for taking things up a notch.

It seems that there's been a newfound interest towards noise in Finnish... well, scenes, considering you can see the same people attending punk, metal and noise concerts. Of course, there's been noise artists involved with the Finnish punk scene since the 90s, but during the recent years we've seen artists like Absolute Key and Haudat taking a step towards the light. Artists, who have been affiliated with rock-based music. What do you think?

Konsta: I somehow feel like there's been more blending of the underground scenes in general and not just with noise? Or things are more approachable, there's less gatekeeping etc. and at least I find that to be just a positive thing. And to be honest, I feel like plenty of the artists I follow from the Finnish noise scene I've gotten to know through their band projects or other associations, so the blending feels quite natural in that way as well. I'm of course a very surface-level noise connoisseur and a complete poser so you can prolly discount my opinions here.

Ossi: I've been keeping half an eye on the Finnish noise scene for the last 15 years or so, and it does seem like things are more active than ever, with lots of new quality artists and a healthy amount of scene overlap. I don't listen to a lot of noise at home but check out the occasional live show, especially enjoying the more physical/hands-on approaches, like Haudat with the reel-to-reel fiddling, or Edge of Decay with the contact-microphoned saw and whatnot.

I couldn't help but notice the legendary Boss HM2 pedal in your noise set. What kind of a role does it play?

Konsta: Eeeh, I might have a slight problem with HM-2s. I think I own 5 or 6 different versions of that pedal at the moment. Felt pretty natural to pop one of those into the noise rig as well. There might be actually two there since I believe my RAT with an HM-2 tone stack is also in the noise rig. The amount of gain those things have makes them pretty perfect for pushing things to feedback out of control and the tone itself is... well, as I own that many of them, you can prolly figure out that I love the sound.

Speaking of pedals, there's quite a lot of them in your rig. Can you give a brief insight on them and their purpose? What pieces are the most important in shaping the sound of Askel?

Konsta: For the guitar board, I guess the critical chain is OD-HM2-delay-reverb. I think I've said enough about the HM-2 already, but I do like to have a tubescreamer just pushing it further, no such thing as too much gain. I've updated both recently to pedals from Unsound Circuitry and can't praise the stuff Miikka makes enough. For the delay/reverb I pretty much keep a really cavernous reverb on at all times to make a single guitar sound larger. Then push that into full shoegaze/wall of noise territory with a dual delay especially for tremolo-picking parts. The rest of the board is pretty much either utility, or things to push noisier parts even further.

Let's speak a while about your album, "Cycles of Ruin". It's quite a piece of work. For example, when I first listened to the album I gave it three spins in a row. The experience was hypnotic and intriguing on many levels, but I feel that I still haven't quite yet fathomed what a monolith it is. It's kind of a cloaked figure which reveals just one fingertip at a time... yet it still isn't longer than 33 minutes. Even though the tempo goes thru the roof sometimes, I still had a hard time comprehending those songs as fast. What do you think?

Konsta: I can't really see them as fast either, or the tempo



is pretty leisurely for the whole record and even the blaster parts are still rooted in that. A lot of the riffs I write are more focused on mood rather than the catchiest hooks or a lot of dynamics, so really it is the drums and bass that bring actual life to the songs.

Ossi: As for the compact length, I think 30-40 minutes of such thick and heavy stuff is plenty. There's no need to drag a song out to double-digit lengths with mindless repetition – and end up with a double-LP – unless it really serves the artistic purpose. We're not a band that jams a lot anyway, and our songs tend to have a relatively unchanging structure, so when we do let things slide into chaos, like at the end of "Denial", the effect actually has some weight to it.

How do you think "Cycles of Ruin" works best? When I gave multiple spins to it, I noticed that it works as a whole monument equally as good as it works divided into single tracks. How did you plan the album in this respect, or are both interpretations equally correct?

Konsta: We didn't necessarily set out to write an album, but by the time we had the five songs ready, I think we realized pretty fast that what we had would make sense as an LP. Concluding the A side with the chaotic outro of "Denial" and picking it back up on side B with the slower buildup of "Temples" seemed really natural. "Ruin" seemed like a good place to leave off, since that's probably the clearest "fuck off" we've managed to write in a song form. Monotone riffs, no groove, no fun, and when you think that the song is finally over after the release of some faster drum beats, the whole thing gets repeated again.

Ossi: A friend noted how "Ruin" ends the album on a blunt note, as if it just runs out of steam. That's a fitting description. No fulfilling climax, catharsis denied, just the bitter aftertaste of disappointment.

What about the thematics of "Cycles of Ruin"? Does the album follow a certain lyrical theme or an idea? Judging by the song titles and quick glances at the lyrics, there seems to be something about... well, ruins.

Konsta: We split the lyrical duties with Ossi, but we've actually laughed a few times at how we've managed to write about the exact same shit without communicating about it at all. The lyrics I wrote for the record are pretty much expanding the original themes of self-destruction to societal/civilisational level. Humanity seems to enjoy building our way into ruins, be that war, responses to climate change, rise of fascism etc. and the more cynical side of me tends to wonder if we can or even deserve to change that.

Ossi: While it's not an intentional theme album, the songs and their themes fell into place in an unexpectedly coherent manner. Then again, the themes of Askel's lyrics in general have largely ended up dealing with self-inflicted downfall, either in an individual sense or a collective one. And I like keeping the lyrics relatively open to interpretation, so that at least some of the songs could be read from either viewpoint. But yeah, in addition to apocalyptic visions of ruin, the record also deals with personal ruination, which actually reminds me of the wonderful Finnish term *ihmisraunio* ("human ruin").

What ruins are, in Askel's context? Layers of history, physical evidence of something that was? Is your approach to the subject something on a spiritual or mental level, or based on something tangible, like ruins of a civilization? Are we toying with concrete or metaphorical subjects, or perhaps both of them?

Konsta: Ossi is the one who actually studied this so should probably actually write the proper response. But for me, I feel like it's very much the idea of something great or potentially great being brought down. The scale doesn't necessarily matter since it's still a tragedy, be that a ruin of a life, a home or a civilization.

Ossi: Heh, I did indeed attend an optional history/archeology course with the inviting title of "In ruins – churches, caches and destruction" around the time of starting to pen the lyrics, which inspired the figures of speech used in "Ruin". But yes to pretty much everything that you suggested... I have a long-standing and multifaceted fascination with ruins. On a more concrete level, I enjoy the decadent aesthetic of decaying structures, whether it's moss-covered castle ruins or abandoned houses being reclaimed by weeds.

Metaphorically speaking, the contrast

between the human and non-human elements is central, as

it marks the ruins as

bittersweet reminders

of the ephemeral

nature of human

achievements and

their inevitable

downfall – a

memento mori

of sorts. On a

personal level,

ruins

represent

destructive

transformation,

whether it's

youthful

idealism

making way to

cynical nihilism,

or hopeful

excitement

towards the future

being replaced by a

world-weary craving

for isolation and death.

When it comes to lyrical themes, are there certain sources of inspiration that stand out?

Konsta: Since I got my mental health to a place where I wasn't occupied constantly with ideas of how to off myself, I had to find something else. In this case, it was pretty much old good Cthulhu mythos and the Dark Souls games. Both of those have themes that I've somehow incorporated into how I think about politics especially.

Ossi: My writing is fueled by negativity in general, but more specific sources of inspiration vary greatly. Ideas might stem just as well from childhood memories, a strange dream, post-apocalyptic fiction, current world events, or simply from staring at specks of dust dancing in the sunlight.

Normally, we could speak of musical influences all day, but... what do you see as prime sources of inspiration when it comes to Askel? Where's the thin line between influence and inspiration? Was "Cycles of Ruin" inspired by something else than, just say, the foundation of the band, or your previous work, the eponymous EP of 2022?

Konsta: I usually say that the whole band is pretty much based on stealing everything from Primitive Man, Neurosis and Godflesh, so that's probably a good starting point. I do think we've managed to find a sound of our own even though that basis is still pretty clearly there. But



yeah, history of music is history of theft... inspiration, and we're no different. I'm blessed by the fact that I'm a bad enough guitarist that when I hear something and try to steal it, it usually turns into something completely different in the end. "Lethan Thirst" is me stealing from myself and reversing "Vision" from the first EP. "Cycles" is originally based on a Rotten Sound riff (How come Rotten Sound does have an album with that exact same title? -Ed.), and with "Ruin" I was really pleased for about a month until one day I went back to listening to Primitive Man and realized I had accidentally ripped off "My Will".

Ossi: I consider "influence" to mean more conscious and direct musical influence that has clearly shaped the sound, while "inspiration" might refer to something that has had an effect on a less obvious and more abstract level. Whereas our influences are pretty much in the area of extreme metal and punk, inspiration can come from much further away. But vocally and lyrically speaking, while there are countless artists whose work I admire, eventually my focus is just on conveying the central emotions and atmospheres of each song the best I can with my own limited abilities. That is not to say that it doesn't feel flattering to be described as a growlier version of Tomas Lindberg, for instance, heh.

I gave a spin to some new Corrupted records while I was browsing one of the previous issues of Spectrum of Circles. In issue 7, Taser stated "Sludge knows no limits!". What do you think?

Konsta: Kyllä kunnon statementtejä pitää olla, but yeah, at this point I find a lot of the really "more traditional" sludge quite boring, or I get into this "if I wanted to listen to EHG, I'd be listening to EHG", so adding new aspects to it is always more than welcome in my books. Unless you do the traditional approach really fucking well like Taser does.

Ossi: Sludge is essentially a crossover genre to begin with, so I don't see a problem with mixing in elements that weren't present in any of the formative sludge bands. Damn, if I had to pick my favorite from those early years, it'd be Acid Bath, easily. They basically sound like grunge from time to time! Or thinking back to how I got into sludge in the first place, it was Loinen that opened the gates for me, and those guys have never been afraid to experiment, rather going for nastiness without boundaries. There are plenty of great traditional-sounding sludge bands out there for sure, but we have no particular need to be one of them.

The important thing is what is conveyed, how it is conveyed is secondary – whichever tool serves the intended outcome can be utilized. There just hasn't been a need for laid-back bluesy groove in our toolbox so far.

Speaking of limits, do you think you are free of them, or perhaps constrained by them? Should you have limits? Are they always a bad thing and instead work as some sort of guidelines?

Konsta: If we stay out of the limits imposed by technical capabilities, I feel like I have a pretty clear view of what I want Askel to sound like, so I guess you could consider that a limit? But personally at least I just find that it makes life easier as long as you don't enforce it too rashly. In a way you could easily view limits as a flipside to having a clear vision for a band, and to be honest, bands that don't know what they are aren't usually very good.

Ossi: As for the unavoidable limits imposed by skills (or lack thereof), gear and so on, they can serve as an inspiring challenge to find inventive solutions, so in that sense, I see limits also as a resource. But no clean vocals coming up any time soon.

I guess that's it. I salute you for your work and for this interview coming true.

Konsta: Thank you as well, was a pleasure!

Ossi: Thank you for the thoughtful questions, Jouni. Good to see you again swept away by the winds of zinestry. Hail the wide Spectrum of Circles!

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